

BRIEF OF SE-46 (8 July 1953), "PROBABLE LONG TERM
DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOVIET BLOC AND WESTERN
POWER POSITIONS"

1. We approached the question "is time on our side" by analyzing probable developments in the Soviet Bloc and the Western nations over a 15-year period, to see which side was likely to increase its power more rapidly. We made two assumptions: (a) no general war; and (b) continuation of the present general trend of policies on both sides.

2. We estimate that if the Soviet Bloc continues its present policies, it will over the next 10-15 years decrease the proportion by which its economic and technological capabilities are inferior to those of the West. Therefore, although the West will probably retain a sizable absolute margin of superiority, we believe that in this respect time is on the Soviet side.

3. More significantly, we believe that well within the period of this estimate both the USSR and the US will acquire the nuclear weapons and the means of delivery with which to cripple the other. Thus, the US is losing, if it has not already lost, its long-standing invulnerability to sudden crippling attack. The US will probably retain superior nuclear offensive capabilities, but this continued superiority will become much less significant, at least with regard to bombardment of strategic targets.

4. In other respects, however, time may be on our side:

a. If conventional rearmament programs and tactical applications of unconventional weapons enhance its present defensive capabilities in overseas areas, the West's relative military posture will thereby be improved over the next 15 years.

b. Moreover, while there is little reason at this time to predict the Soviet Bloc's decay or collapse, the USSR may lack that flexibility and vitality which contribute to a political system's survival and growth. A struggle for control within the Kremlin might also cause a retraction and decay of Soviet power. It would be unsafe to assume, however, that the problems which are inherent in the Soviet system will of themselves have reached critical proportions within the next 15 years.

5. Indeed the political and social trends which will have an important and perhaps controlling effect on both the Bloc and Western power positions are most difficult to estimate over so long a period as the next 15 years. While trends can be identified which might undermine either side's political stability and cohesion (such as the trend now running against the West in underdeveloped areas), we cannot predict the ultimate effects of these trends, particularly within the next 15 years.

6. Thus even under the assumption of a continuation of present general policies by both the West and the Bloc, there are so many accidental and unpredictable factors which could alter present trends that we are unable to conclude that time is or is not on our side.